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Marc Featherly

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Oral History Interview with Marc Featherly,
in Hansen Student Center, April 15, 2016
Conducted by Meg Miner, Illinois Wesleyan Archivist

Meg Miner: Good afternoon. This is Meg Miner. I am the archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University, and today is April 15th, 2016. I am in the basement of Hansen Center with- not really retired, but kind of retired long-time staffer for Illinois Wesleyan. Please introduce yourself, Marc.

Marc Featherly: I am Marc Featherly. I am retired – I *am* retired.

Miner: You are retired, okay. Gosh darn it, but you are still working.

Featherly: Former university photographer for about eighteen years.

Miner: When did you start?

Featherly: Eighteen years ago.

[laughter]

Featherly: Ah is that 96, I think.

Miner: 96, okay.

Featherly: Actually, my first day on the job was pay day, then-at that time everybody got paid. Staff all got paid on the 20th of the month.

Miner: Ah!

Featherly: So, it's easy to remember my first day on the job.

Miner: A memorable day.

[Featherly laughs]

Miner: Probably wasn't much of a check. [laughs]

Featherly: There wasn't any check.

[laughter]

Miner: That's funny. So, tell how- uh tell me something about how you got to know uh Illinois Wesl- you from this area?

Featherly: I worked for *The Pantagraph* for twenty years, so I was on campus a lot.

Miner: Okay, doing that kind of work.

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: And then you said you are also a freelancer?

Featherly: I left *The Pantagraph* and freelanced for about four years, and Wesleyan was my biggest customer.

Miner: And you would do...

Featherly: Photography of-

Miner: Of anything.

Featherly: Yeah, the same; pretty much the same kinds of things I was doing as a full-time staff or only less of covering events, sports - some sports, uh particular shooting assignments for the uh that-the monthly - the quarterly magazine.

Miner: Aha.

Featherly: But uh a lot of things just uh recording the history of the place; there were some groundbreakings and things like that. Uh...

Miner: 96 would have been umm center for liberal arts... time period? Certainly, Shirk would have come along.

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Changes to - or-or the creation of-

Featherly: Construction. Cons- a-and I-I recorded the construction remodeling in a lot of buildings because it was one of the things that was really an important focus on the campus for quite a few years. Building and rebuilding.

Miner: So, how did this work differ from what you were doing in the *Pantagraph*?

Featherly: Not a whole lot really other than the subject matter was pretty much all campus related: alumni, students, faculty, staff. Umm very little in the way of fire and accidents and riots on this campus.

Miner: Yay! [laughing]

Featherly: Little, little of each but-but not much.

Miner: Okay, good!

Featherly: But-But, you know, it was the same kind of work dealing with people; re... recording, reporting on what they were doing, making it interesting to-to people who wanna know about it.

Miner: Ah-huh. And umm the - the direction that you got for your work like, you know, assignments that you were given or were you given a lot of latitude with that kind of thing or is it a mixed bag?

Featherly: It was mixed. Umm everything – a lot of it was self-generated, but a lot of it was specific assignments to-to illustrate a story or to cover an event. Umm I - as time went on, I-I-I became more self-generated because I – the people I was working with changed, and as I became... better acquainted with what they were gonna wanna use or wanna save. I just simply studied the calendars and-and announcements of upcoming events and got them out of my calendar and I was... expecting to do things before other people even thought about them.

Miner: So, you kinda got ahead of the curb?

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Ah-huh. That's great.

Featherly: I have to-

Miner: That must have-

Featherly: I have to because people – well, one of the - the communications, one of the things that people think of last when on planning an event.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: So, you can run into some serious conflicts if didn't – if you are not looking ahead.

Miner: Mmm it's a bit of an ernie. Hmm, and then there are all the unexpected things that come up to-

Featherly: Plenty of those.

Miner: Ah.

Featherly: Lots of that, and you got to be – you gotta be flexible.

Miner: What do you think some of the biggest changes are that you have seen not just-not physical, I mean one of those are pretty well documented or-or maybe two if they affected your work in a particular way.

Featherly: Only affected my work in that they created work changes.

Miner: [chuckles] Yeah.

Featherly: You know, re- I've spent a lot of time going through construction sites and just keeping it up on running record of things that were... being built.

Miner: So, tell me a little bit about what er- Illinois Wesleyan and Bloomington were like in - when you first got to campus then.

Featherly: Alright, that – in those days, that was befo- we-we've gone through tremendous growth... in a lot of ways: social and-and economic and physical growth-

Miner: And the community as well as campus.

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Yeah. Ah that fire back and-and the years before that, the community really – I think... people thought of it as a small town even though it wasn't.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: It was a medium sized town, but it-it – because... of the economy, the-the agriculture - the big agriculture, and now that very stable large businesses like State Farm and country companies, and the universities. We didn't have as large a-a blue color and-and uh union influence, and it was... a-a people just thought of it in more small term- small town terms. There were still a lot of people who didn't lock the doors-

Miner: Ah-huh. Ah-huh.

Featherly: That kind of thing. Umm and gradually over the last twenty or thirty years, we've become more like a lot of other larger or medium cities. Umm and some of that – the closeness and that-that hometowniness has gone.

Miner: Mmm.

Featherly: The campus, staff, and faculty were smaller and closer, and longevity was a big thing. People stayed on the job here –

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: On the univers- at the university for a long time. I – we used to have an annual dinner, and they talk about the-the number of years that people have been on the job, not just individuals but as a – as a group; the average was a lot longer than most places.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: So, there-there was a - a kind of a family community feeling that was... it was kinda fun, you know. People were closer, and they-they knew each other better and-and work together. You know, there was teamwork and f- almost the, you know, that-the-the idea of the-the campus family was-was promoted and accepted.

Miner: Huh. Can you attribute that kind of umm that the - the manifestation of that to anything in particular? Do you think – I mean, why would a place like this have such long time-

Featherly: It was-

Miner: -people?

Featherly: It was a good place to work. Be that – the, you know, people on top thought about the people on the bottom, I think, enough to keep people happy. Uh-

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: What we didn't make a lot of money-

Miner: Right.

Featherly: But... everything considered it was a good place to work.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: And people felt good about staying here. They weren't always uh on look for something better. There were enough good things about the place that would've been hard to-to-do better.

Miner: Hmm. Great. And so, you have been umm at the Pantagraph since the 70s, so you have been able to see two presidents before Minor. I just stop and think.

Featherly: Yeah, but I didn't have close contact with them.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Uh-

Miner: I am just thinking about, you know, like when you said the people at the top-

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: -care about the people at the bottom, I mean-

Featherly: Well, you can see that when you get closer.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Or when I – when I-when I started – when I started working here more, you know. I can see-

Miner: So-

Featherly: -how things worked.

Miner: Something that you observed really strictly in the Myer's era.

Featherly: Yeah, but you see-

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: You-You can see people talk about the old days, and-

Miner: Sure.

Featherly: And-and you still get the-the-the feeling that they felt good about the place they worked.

Miner: Hmm. And you think that changed over time?

Featherly: No, I think it's still a good place to work, and I think people still like being here, but it has changed in the – we've-we've... it's not as – people aren't as close. Umm it's – a-and some of that is just... today-

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: And it's the way the whole world is, and that the community and that the university have-have moved along. Umm this some of it is that... the personal hands on... management has had to give away.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: To more – I hate to use the word “professional”, but I can't think of a better one right now; a more professional. You know, more rules and living by the rules, and-and less-less personal instinct and-and hands on management-

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: -kinds of things.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: You know, there's a lot more book keeping, and a lot more [chuckles] rules of how to behave instead of people just being good people and-and doing their best.

Miner: It's a lot of bottom line kind of-

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: - thing.

Featherly: That's-That's part of it.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: Definitely part of it.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: But it's, you know, it-it comes to from the uh the management style of-of our leader's. Umm Minor Myers was a very much a hand on, and he was kind of impulsive, and he was a dreamer, and umm thought long term about making things big and better and great, and didn't have the time or the patience or the personality to deal with the details of how it got done.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: And as we progressed, umm Dick Wilson was... far more organized and a lot more serious planning and-and worked... closer with a professional staff. And so, things just-just got a little better organized. Umm again, I go to the word professional. I am not completely happy with that but I don't know what else to call.

Miner: Ah-huh. Ah-huh. Well-structured-

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Uh-

Featherly: Yeah, yeah.

Miner: Deliberate approach rather than-

Featherly: Yes, yeah, yeah.

Miner: That kind of thing.

Featherly: Exactly.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: That's-That's exactly right.

Miner: Yeah. So, what ways then would that sort of affect you in your work? That change in leadership; umm you came here would have been a third of the way through the Myer's era, so people had already apparently gotten used to the way he was working. And so, then you saw about a dec- well, not quite a decade of him but then a transition to a very different kind of personality. Can you comment a little bit about any specifics in your work that would have changed or things that you saw on campus?

Featherly: You know-

Miner: Or the community?

Featherly: From - From my perspective, I am too far down the food chain.

Miner: But you are everywhere.

Featherly: I am. Uh and-and i-it's kind of a unusual relationship with the presidents. Umm the people between us worked with the presidents more closely than I do—did, and had their views; I know some people got very frustrated with Minor because he could be impulsive and uh a little disorganized. Umm but when I got – when-when it came my turn to work with him, the planning and preparation and things like that is pretty much done, and I worked with him... on projects in stages. I photographed them as they were doing things whether it was an event or to-to illustrate a story or something. And so, I had very good working relationships with the presidents. They- They real- they realize – they understand that even though neither of them are-were-were.... Interested in personal publicity or pub- a lot of plub- public attention, they understood that it comes with the job-

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: That the president of the university has to be out front, and [knocks on table] in sub-some situations is an important part of the story.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And so, they were very gracious about standing still.

[laughter]

Featherly: Long enough to-to get the pictures necessary, and they were both ready to be out from in front of the camera as soon as what uh- because it was –

Miner: Is their right?

Featherly: Right. Uh they did not feel away. Some important people do that they should be involved in everything.

Miner: Huh, hmm.

Featherly: They knew that it was important at times, and not necessary at others.

Miner: That's interesting.

Featherly: So, that was... my relationship with both of them. I-I had a good relationship with guys who understood [knocks on table] what we were doing.

Miner: It's a job and-

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Part of the job and-

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Do it to move on to something else.

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: Huh. You umm mentioned before we started recording umm the picture of that's - uh the portrait of Minor up in the Bates and Merwin reading room rotunda.

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: Umm can you talk a little bit about why that photograph was taken and umm-

Featherly: Oh god, I can't even remember this.

Miner: Would've been so-

Featherly: The exact-

Miner: -early on your time here or?

Featherly: Ahhm... I can't remember the exact timing of it; why we did it exactly. We did always with president's update our-our official portraits... o-occasionally.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Uh there's always uh a desire to do it maybe once a year, but that didn't happen because they didn't care being in front of the camera any more than that.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: But, that particular portrait was part of a session.... And I can't remember if it was to update the official portrait or if there was a more specific-

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: -reason for it. But, we did it in a two or three locations, and we – for at least a significant part of the session – we included old books because that was collecting old books and reading them thoroughly and knowing how they were produced and everything about old books was a passion for-for-for Minor. So, we included the uh the old book, and I don't even remember what it was, but it was, you know-

Miner: It's got-

Featherly: We-We got in-

Miner: -images in it.

Featherly: I feel- I think we got into some of the archives where there are – you've got some really old ones.

Miner: It doesn't look like it was taken in the archives, so-

Featherly: No.

Miner: -it looks like it was like a book of heraldry or something like that.

Featherly: Yeah, I am just - I really can't remember.

Miner: Mere memory would have taken it.

Featherly: No. No, but it o- it was staged the way it was because of his love of old books.

Miner: Okay. That seemed to be a way that he preferred to because did –

Featherly: He was –

Miner: -he have a lot of choice in that?

Featherly: Yeah, he-the-they always – people who-when you done a portrait always have. I say so; -

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: I-It means to reflect the person.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Umm and occasionally he would say nah that's-that's not right or-or if we were struggling a little bit coming with something – with – coming up with something, it was-that was comfortable and-and that they felt was right for them. Uh you know, person makes suggestions. In this case, we went in knowing what we were gonna do some stuff involving the old books, I know that.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: And-And I will say that he-he really did like that picture. It was sometimes he liked his picture and sometimes he didn't, but that was probably his all-time favorite.

Miner: That's amazing.

Featherly: And so- two or three others I think from that session he liked a lot.

Miner: Huh. Well, certainly is some-something that people comment on as being how they remember him.

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: Glasses down, nose-

Miner: Glasses down-

[Featherly chuckles]

Miner: Yep. Look at him with a little smile on his face. The umm Wilsons when you took their pictures, I mean it was – wasn't always of them as a couple, but it often seemed to be outside. So, is that a reflection of their... interest, too? No? You are looking at me like I am crazy.

Featherly: No. No, I don't think uh the out- outdoors wasn't particularly important. Umm we did several of them, several sessions with them, and we didn't even come close to the shoot – up- updating them every year.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: But, umm one of the things that we wound up looking for a lot of times was... a classic campus look, and our buildings; you know, we don't have ivy covered, colonial buildings

on this campus. They are all kind of... modern, ordinary, not as classical looking. And so, we looked for other ways to photograph them [confusing words] and the interiors on this campus are the same way. They are not-

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: The-They are not really distinctive.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: Uh they are just useful, practical indoor settings.

[Miner chuckles]

Featherly: So, we wound up shooting them outdoors because we could incorporate things like s-fall colors.

Miner: Right. Yeah.

Featherly: Uh mixed with hints of some of our buildings, some of our – some of our more recognizable buildings.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: But the-the-the reasoning was more for the-the – the color, and you know, about that late afternoon light that kind of thing.

Miner: Okay. So, don't read too much into that.

Featherly: No.

Miner: [laughs]. Okay, just – so, since we were talking about –

Featherly: Now we did – we did-

Miner: Minor.

Featherly: -some on Minor like that, too, but he was even less of – he-he really wasn't an outdoors person.

Miner: Yeah. [chuckles]

Featherly: And so, we didn't look so much for the colors uh kinda we did do more... indoor types of situations.

Miner: But not a lot with his family.

Featherly: No. No, the-the kids – I barely met his kids.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: Uh the whole time he was here. Ellen, I knew a lot. Uh she was always at events, but umm she chose to stay out of pictures for the most part. She wasn't as involved other than his host that she wasn't nearly as involved in campus as Pat Wilson.

Miner: Yeah. Hmm. So, what umm I mean gosh you have spanned the format. You and I have had many conversations about-

[Featherly chuckles]

Miner: -photographic formats over the years. Maybe you wanna talk a little bit about how that changes the nature of your work or-or the, you know, the... gah how many-

Featherly: Well –

Miner: comments or insights-

Featherly: The nature-

Miner: to share with us-

Featherly: The nature-

Miner: -on that?

Featherly: -of my work changed theoretically. I was kind of... hesitant to change from film to digital.

Miner: Aha.

Featherly: Stalled, when other places were beginning to make the change. I kept – tried to keep an eye on things, and eventually started doing some testing and got my friends at the Pantagraph who had already switched to do some tests and let me borrow a camera and some things like that. And then... when we made the decision to make the change, I expected to make it gradually. And as soon as I got my hands on that first digital camera, I started using Photoshop instead of a dark room. I never went back.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: I never shot another role of film, and I still haven't, and never will!

Miner: So, when are – about when would've that have happened?

Featherly: 2003. Early 2003.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: [laughs] That's how important -

Miner: Yep.

Featherly: -it was to me. I can remember; it was probably February.

Miner: Back in those days.

[Featherly laughs]

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: But-

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: You know, I-I literally, probably spent millions of hours in my career standing in a dark room.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: And... now I can sit on my soft chair and-and-

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: The things I can do... not to change the content of the – truth of the picture, but just to-to... because the camera does lie –

Miner: Yeah. [laughs]

Featherly: The camera isn't as accurate as you'd like it to be sometimes based on the light and contrast and a lot of things, a lot of physical things. It's a lot easier... to make pictures... that look like what the human eye sees.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: With digital than what most of us were able to do with film.

Miner: You can't go back and –

Featherly: And you can spend a lot – y-you can with-with... less effort, you can accomplish some really interesting, creative approaches to-to... make a picture snap to make it – make it more eye appealing and still not change the truth, the content-

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: -of the picture, you know.

Miner: And you self-taught... those–

Featherly: Pretty much.

Miner: -those techniques.

Featherly: Pretty much. I mean I-I ask a lot of questions-

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: -to a lot of people who know a lot more than I do. A lot of us just... try on one more thing, and then few weeks later, they try another thing and eventually learn to accomplish something without really knowing how you got there.

Miner: Huh. I should have asked to begin with; how did you get started in photography?

Featherly: Well, my parents both dabbled a little bit when they were young, and in high school, maybe even as far back as junior high, they thought it might be something I outta – I should get interested in a little bit. They bought some used, old equipment that I didn't really care about, but I got interested in model railroading and-and trains and local history, and eventually I wanted to take a few pictures of the hobbies. And so, I started using the-the – the old pieces of equipment that they bought and gradually over several years, one thing lead to another, and the trains faded and-

Miner: huh.

Featherly: -photography grew. Got more-

Miner: Ah.

Featherly: Became more and more important.

Miner: And you grew up in this area?

Featherly: No, I am from Michigan.

Miner: From Michigan, okay. And you said local history, I thought maybe you meant –

Featherly: I have always been interested in history. My hometown Jackson, Michigan, has – there are a lot of parallels with Bloomington-Normal. Umm railroad going through there was just as important as it was here.

Miner: Aha.

Featherly: We had uh shops and yards were very comparable to the yards that were so important to Bloomington-Normal. Umm the history of the place; uh you can go - drive through Jackson and you see old homes that look just like the old homes in the - the older parts of Bloomington. Uh... Abe Lincoln was there.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: They re- they – it's one of two places that claims to be the birthplace of the republican party.

Miner: Oh [laughs].

Featherly: You know, the civil war contribution was comparable-

Miner: Sure.

Featherly: -to Bloomington-Normal. Uh-

Miner: Wow.

Featherly: It's close to the state capital, so there's a lot of interaction; political and business uh this comparable to Bloomington-Normal. There's just a lot of it – tree-lined streets. A lot of similarities, and-and I've always enjoyed history, so.

Miner: That's great. The umm reason that you come down here then from up there-

Featherly: Job.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: I got a job at the Pantagraph.

Miner: So right from the start, and that's why you worked your way down.

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: That's great. Do you work now for the Pantagraph's again or you are done with that? But you are still working for Wesleyan?

Featherly: Yeah. Well, I freelance. Pick up-

Miner: Right.

Featherly: -an occasional assignment.

Miner: Right. Because you retired in 14?

Featherly: Umm-

Miner: 2014 or?

Featherly: End of whatever that year was. Now this is 16, 15, yeah at the end of 14.

Miner: Fourteen, yeah.

Featherly: Uh December 31st, 2014.

Miner: But didn't really stop. Just stopped –

Featherly: Yes, I did. In fact, I went –

Miner: Oh, okay.

Featherly: -several months without hardly picking up a camera. [laughs]

Miner: Oh!

Featherly: But –

Miner: Was that by choice?

Featherly: It's just the way it worked out. I mean I-I hoped and expected to pick up a few assignments, but [clears throat] because they didn't fill in my slot. Didn't re- didn't-didn't hire another photographer. Umm they planned on using staff to do some and hire a freelance to do the more important things.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: And... I just kinda became their main go to freelance because of my familiarity, and because well, I know what they need and how to get it.

Miner: We are lucky you are here.

[Featherly clears throat]

Miner: Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about Bob Erin? I think there's –

Featherly: I had lunch with him a couple of weeks ago.

Miner: Did you?

Featherly: Yeah. Umm what he is – Bob was... very professional. Umm [clears throat] before - mostly before my time, he kind of... transformed a - the public relations operation. Umm... it became more professional, and they... began promoting... things of interest I guess. The feature stories became a lot more important about anything: interesting people, their activities, alumni who would accomplish, you know, big things. They s- they started working harder to... get the word out to-to let people know about all the interesting and-and significant things that-that go on – on the campus, and by our graduates and alumni and uh getting away – they-they were getting away from the – the press release approach to public relations.

Miner: huh.

Featherly: Umm... i-it wasn't advertising. It was just there's a lot of really interesting stuff that goes on around here –

Miner: Yeah, story-telling.

Featherly: And they-they – they were searching it out and-and developing stories and-and getting them out.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: Uh that's why they - uh magazine developed from little more than a newsletter to a really nice and very often very interesting publication.

Miner: And filled with a lot of very useful historical things for me. [laughs]

Featherly: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Miner: For research, you know.

Featherly: But they uh that-the-the press releases umm instead of just saying there's gonna be an event on Thursday afternoon at-at 3 o'clock, umm they would get those out-

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And-and the-they, I know... toward the end of my time, Sherry used – was – Sherry Wallace kept close count on a press releases – basic press releases, and it was like thousands of them.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: But, they also release stories.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: They would make point of contacting... educational publications or if they had a uh someone in the uh science department that was doing some interesting research, they'd contact publications that-that catered to chemistry or biology –

Miner: Hmm. Huh.

Featherly: And promote stories to get – to get the – the university name out there.

Miner: So, really selling it.

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Ah. And so, that was happening – that didn't happen until after you came or the transition had already started?

Featherly: It was already – they were - they were already doing that.

Miner: Yeah. That's interesting.

Featherly: There's always been some of that sort of thing I guess, but-but uh with Bob, it became far more important. The press release stuff is important, but it's not interesting.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And they were trying to get information out that's interesting to make the wha- the kind of thing that would make people stop and take a look.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And remember...

Miner: So, really hand in hand with kind of- admissions kind of thing.

Featherly: Very much so, yes.

Miner: So, less of uh... huh er- com- communications. [laughs]

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: Right? I mean-

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: That just-

Featherly: Uh the communications office –

Miner: Announcement, bulletin board –

Featherly: -works-

Miner: -kind of things.

Featherly: Yeah, they wor- they-they – they do work very closely with admissions.

[Pause]

Featherly: Umm because among other things the admissions people... have a lot of close contact with students after they come to campus and-

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: -not just before they come here.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: So, they know that there's this kid who has really done some great stuff in high school who's gonna be on campus next year, you gotta talk to him. At the same time, they will still be talking to him next year because he has got friends coming along.

Miner: True.

Featherly: They stay in close contact with students all the way through their career here –

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: And so, the-the admissions people know this kid's doing some really interesting research, that kid's become a great singer.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: Umm and they-they – they provide a lot of-of ideas –

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: For-for stories.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: So, that-that the relationship is-is very close, and when I started... communications or what it was called – I don't even remember – the-the department is –

Miner: Maybe it was just-

Featherly: The name has evolved.

Miner: -the publicity office.

Featherly: Uh it was –

Miner: For a long time wasn't it?

Featherly: Yeah, but it was different than that I think. It's evolved gradually over the years, and I've never been able to keep track of it.

[laughter]

Featherly: But umm, when I started, the office was under the admissions director.

Miner: Oh.

Featherly: Who-Who were one of like three divisions or something under him.

Miner: Oh.

Featherly: Uh it's not now; we've got our own vice president.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: But uh for quite a few years, it was part of his area.

Miner: Huh. Alright. Let's see, we've talked about – little bit about personal and leadership and

Featherly: [chuckles] I know we haven't talked a lot about Minor, but that's because – maybe because... the things you were asking me about is collections and stuff. I only know about by word of mouth.

Miner: Sure.

Featherly: Uhh had -

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: -really very little con- contact with him. I mean he-he was fascinated by – with-with everything. He loved trains and had a- and i-in spite of my history with trains, he – I never saw his.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: But he – he did have some-some model railroad equipment I know. Some –

Miner: Did you guys talk about any –

Featherly: Just –

Miner: -by chance?

Featherly: Just fadely, -

Miner: Yeah, because it was all about the job.

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: Mostly when-when I – by the time he and I would get together, we had a purpose. We had to do a story or we were at an event or something, and-and there wasn't a lot of uh how's your family-

Miner: Yeah. Right.

Featherly: That sort of thing. Uh –

Miner: People are –

Featherly: An- But I – I will say this, and I will say the same thing about Dick Wilson, umm... part of... part of what makes this place attractive to work is that both of them knew pretty much every one on campus. They knew when important things were happening in people's lives.

Miner: Ah.

Featherly: And I can tell you that I - I've had some deaths in the family... and each of them took time aside to sit down and talk personally and privately with me.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: On those occasions and that - that means a lot.

Miner: Make some impression.

Featherly: People – people know that somebody cares.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: And it's-it's – it's... a factor that you don't think about much, but it's there.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: When you - When you...when-when – when lon- longevity is involved, you know.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: You know that somebody is paying a- ack- attention. I know behind the theme- scene stories years ago when we were facing budget cuts and stuff. The first series of budget cuts; they made it very clear that whatever we do, we are not going to cut staff.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And I know that when... staff cuts became necessary, they looked for ways to make it as easy as possible buyouts and phase retirement and things like that. And I know a couple of situations where... toward the end of my time... when... when managers were asked to cut a percentage from their coming year's budgets, there were a few people who were laid off. There were other people who were asked to take nine months jobs instead of twelve months jobs, and couple of situations where people were... told that they could – should take a nine months job. Uh Wilson said, "No, that person has been around too long. We are not gonna treat him like that."

Miner: Oh wow.

Featherly: Yeah, stories like that circulate.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: People know and people, you know, it-it-it builds loyalty.

Miner: Yeah. Well, and the ability to... to feel like there's a shared umm well, you know, community again, right?

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: I mean when – and I-I think President Wilson handled that admirably initially that we were all in a spot. Umm obviously, there were people who felt it more -

[Featherly laughs]

Miner: -umm than others.

Featherly: Well –

Miner: But-But –

Featherly: People - People tend to take things like that very personally.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: Instead of seeing the... you know, we gotta do something –

Miner: Right.

Featherly: -or we are gonna – we are gonna fall apart.

Miner: Right. Yeah. [sighs] Oh my goodness. Umm... What else? Anything else?

Featherly: Hmm, I-I got one story I like to tell and somehow about Minor. Umm... you – I don't know. Were you here when Shirk center was dedicated?

Miner: Uh-uh.

Featherly: Alright, it was a huge thing. Minor liked to do things like that big; liked to make them really important. And, we had a – it was timed to coincide with homecoming, so we'd have maximum a number of people including alumni around because they, you know, they'd have a huge campaign, raise a lot of money, and-and uh it was gonna be a state of the art... facility. Something that-that you just didn't see much of in division three schools.

Miner: yeah.

Featherly: So, they wanted to make it a huge thing, and one of the events; there's always the-the uh they call it the "Alumni Awards Luncheon".

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: On Saturday uh of homecoming, and that was to be slanted toward part of the dedication. And, they ho- had set-up; they expecting something over six hundred people to sit at tables, on the floor in the-the basketball gym, and they wanted a-a picture to commemorate the situation. And, Minor – this was – this came from Minor. He wanted everybody to be in the picture to commemorate that-that big event.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: And so, we coordinated... with the president's office and planning the event and there was a slot build into the program: at certain point where Myer would be at the microphone and

he would say, “Okay, I don’t want everybody to-to look at the camera. I want to take a picture to commemorate this event.” So, ... I don’t have... a powerful voice.

[Miner chuckles]

Featherly: And I wanted to be sure that it was s-staged and handled as well as possible. So, I got super wide-angle lens and had a extra tall ladder, step ladder –

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: Set it up in the corner of the balcony. It’s the only way I could get back as far enough to see –

Miner: Oh my gosh.

Featherly: - the whole room-

Miner: Oh.

Featherly: -and all of those people. That’s probably twice the number of people that we get for the alumni luncheon now.

Miner: Oh my gosh.

Featherly: And they – they pretty well filled up the-the gym floor. I had a helper, and I made some-some uh... I can’t think of that uh-uh that... cue cards.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: Large cue cards on-on cardboard. And so, Minor said, “Okay, I want everybody to turn around and face the camera up in the corner of the room”, and first cue card might - helper set out said, “Look at the camera”, and there –

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: -was a big arrow pointing to me up on the ladder. And then, second cue card said “Smile”.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: Next cue card said “Just one more”.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: And one that said “Thank you!”

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: And Minor just clap – cracked up. He loved it.

Miner: He thought that was great.

Featherly: Yeah.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: So.

Miner: Ah, so was unusual for him to be in- that involved in like suggesting uh a topic for photograph or?

Featherly: Well, he-he wanted – no, he wanted –

Miner: Because of such a –

Featherly: Like I said, he wasn't – yeah. He wasn't want to get involved in the details.

Miner: Sure.

Featherly: He-He had the-the big idea.

Miner: Sure.

Featherly: And he dreamed of-of big things. And so, you know, through in a little bit of-of show bizz, making it an event; he loved it.

Miner: Yeah. Huh. Uh that's a great story. [chuckles] I love your cue cards. Umm... one of the things about his time here I think umm that a lot of people remembers the range of international figures. National and –

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: - international figures –

Featherly: Oh yeah.

Miner: - that brought to campus which you would have been –

Featherly: Yes.

Miner: - really witness to. Do you have any stories or recollections of those –

[Featherly chuckles]

Miner: -kind of things?

Featherly: I don't know. Uh my biggest thought on that was it was really pretty impressive, I thought.

Miner: So was unusual.

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Umm I don't know really uh... I-I as- I assume that some other small schools get some pretty good names from time to time, but uh we really did have some fairly impressive – we had several umm...god, don't get old. my memory goes...

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: Umm umm...

Miner: Like government or actor or-

Featherly: What's the-the – that-the big international award? I can't name it. They-they-they –

Miner: The Pulitzer?

Featherly: No, -

Miner: Oh.

Featherly: Witter.

Miner: An international award?

Featherly: Science, Swedish...

Miner: The Nobel.

Featherly: Nobel!

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: We had a slew of Nobel merits-

Miner: Good win. Okay.

Featherly: - who came through campus. Some of them where what you might expect; the absent-minded professor –

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: - who got up there and recited – recited formulas and things like that, and some of them were superb.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: Uh one of the first that I saw, and I wa- ye- I won't remember his name, but he was – he-he was the one responsible for the-the theory of the dinosaur's extinction- extinction being due to the-the-the-the – the meteor crashing into the planet, was a superb speaker.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: Highly inspirational I thought.

Miner: Hmm. Huh.

Featherly: Umm I mean, he j- he didn't talk so much about his work. He talked about... making the most of your life. You know, very inspirational-

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: -kind of thing.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: Great speech.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: Umm and we've – w-we-we got some-some fairly important uh government figures. Uh... umm Donald Rumsfeld was one that comes to mind, and uh... uh Sir-Sir-Sir Edwar- Ed-E-E-

Miner: Ed Heath.

Featherly: Keath. H-Heath.

Miner: Heath.

Featherly: Heath.

Miner: Yep.

Featherly: Heath.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: Edward Heath uh –

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: - passed prime minister Great Britain. Just fascinating to-to be –

Miner: Mmm.

Featherly: -around those people.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And, in my job, I-I got to be around them all the day

Miner: I was gonna say. Yeah.

Featherly: Uh one of the things I always liked about my work was uh having just a little bit closer contact with anything that's going on. I always say that I-I work in front of the front row.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: Uh I- and I get to-to mingle with people, just a little bit. I don't really get to mingle, and I don't collect autographs or anything, but I-I – I've had experience from being there, and it's really cool.

Miner: They pay you to get in people's faces.

Featherly: Yeah, kinda.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: In a polite, respectful sort of way.

Miner: Yeah [laughs]. Did you ever see Minor collecting autographs? It's a story I heard recently.

Featherly: I think he did, but I can't – can't really... cite... a situation.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: I think he – it was important to him that uh – he may have been responsible for-for people signing their books for the library.

Miner: Ah that's pretty – that's possible –

Featherly: I don't know.

Miner: It's pretty common.

Featherly: I-I - I really –

Miner: The books that is common, but –

Featherly: Yeah. I-I –

Miner: I've – I am think- thinking more of a personal –

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: -collection of signatures.

Featherly: I-I've – I think I've heard that he did, but I – again I can't.

Miner: Yeah. That's okay, just asking. Because somebody did say that he collected prime ministers was sort of a joke –

[Featherly laughs]

Miner: -that somebody had, but that was what I was thinking of earlier was asking you was there experiences with some of these dignitaries –

Featherly: Yeah.

Miner: Because, yeah, I don't like to wonder how widespread a practice that is or. Yeah.

Featherly: Uh I – when - [laughs] I have to laugh about uh Heath. Uh he cost a lot of money; I know that his contract included he had to be flown across on a uh - the –

Miner: Concord?

Featherly: Supersonic speed concord.

Miner: Oooh.

Featherly: And had to pay for, I don't know; two or three staffers to come with him.

Miner: Jeese.

Featherly: And first-class accommodations all the way. And a bottle of his favorite gin close by.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: And – I know he complained bitterly about the boring drive from Chicago to Bloomington, but how flat and uninteresting the country seemed.

Miner: Couldn't get him on a plane from Chicago to here. [laughs]

Featherly: I don't know how that worked why –

Miner: Yeah. Just so –

Featherly: Why he didn't fly, but he-he was really bored with that drive.

[Miner chuckles]

Featherly: Umm but I've always said that we got our money's worth out of him because we worked that old gentleman really hard.

[Miner chuckles]

Featherly: He was – that-the - Minor liked to talk about renaissance people.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: And he definitely was a renaissance man. So, while he was here, he gave master classes in sailing, uh two or three in, I don't – not sure specifically what but-but, you know, school of music. He rehearsed and conducted uh the civic orchestra.

Miner: Hmm.

Featherly: Uh he gave several public speeches. He was the-the featured guest at two or three major receptions. Uh he gave a couple of press conferences. I mean we - he was here for three or four days, and we-we worked him hard.

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: So.

Miner: Yeah. That's good I guess if you are gonna –

Featherly: If you are gonna spend that kind of money, you wanna get your money's worth.

Miner: And come all that way.

Featherly: It's just – [laughs] I don't think that people at that level are used to being –

[Miner laughs]

Featherly: -used....

Miner: Required to –

Featherly: -quite so much.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: [laughs] He was good about it, and-and it was really uh good for our students.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: Uh and they – he-his presence I think as I recall this was kind of a - the-the catalyst or excuse for several other things where there were a couple of-of our alumni who were working their way out, but-and some good things in-in government work, and they came back and sat in with him on some discussions and gave some of their own master classes and things like that.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: So, it's really, really an interesting –

Miner: Nicely tied in.

Featherly: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: Wow. So, that was, you know, leads to the next obvious question is the effect on the community of somebody with vision, right? Who may or may not, we don't know for sure yet, be doing something unusual by inviting big wigs to uh smaller liberal arts college in the middle of boring fields in central Illinois! I mean what kind of uh change or-or what kind of influences do you think that had on students? Because you thought he caught an impression on students and – I mean...

Featherly: I am not in a position, but I-I suspect it would might have been... the beginning of a change in the type of students we recruited.

Miner: Okay.

Featherly: Uh-a- and adjustment if you will, uh toward a little... little more highly qualified. You know, not just a kid who wanted to get a college education, but the kid who's maybe gonna make a mark in the world.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Featherly: A more significant mark.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: I-I-I – I suspect the – that was kind of – well, I know-I am sure that that was Minor's- Minor's goal was to-to raise the-the qualifications of our incoming students and-and having... speakers like that. Uh certainly, we promoted things like that a-after the fact we used to put out a brochure and update it occasionally and called "The Speaker's Brochure". And, we listed and-and had quotes and pictures of all the significant speakers who came to campus.

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: And so, that was-that was a tool that they-they-they uh the admissions office could use. Now these are the important people that you are gonna have a chance to-to rub elbows with.

Miner: Yeah. Well, uh to model what we think successful people are in the world.

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: And this is what it looks like.

Featherly: Well, -

Miner: You can do that here.

Featherly: Not just that, but they-they always had a chance for-for people to attend master classes –

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: -and-and uh workshops and things like that –

Miner: Huh.

Featherly: -with these-these big name people. And, yeah, that's - that-that means a lot to-to - to high school kid –

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: -who's-who's – who is looking at two different schools and one of them got Sir Edward Heath, and he wanted to go under political science –

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: He got a chance to spend a couple of hours with him.

Miner: Yeah.

Featherly: And e-even in a group. That's-That's enticing.

Miner: Yeah. Hmm. That's great. What else? I think we've covered the basis.

Featherly: You got a prompt [laughs] because my memory just –

Miner: Okay. Well, you know...

Featherly: You know, I am not-not –

Miner: People, places, events, [deep breath] major transitions in personal, right?

Featherly: Ah-huh.

Miner: So, the leadership that you witnessed. I can't think of anything else... I am getting about the same look from you, so maybe –

[laughter]

Miner: Maybe-

Featherly: I am not – I am not enough–

Miner: -we'll stop at there and –

Featherly: I am not a good enough storyteller. I-I, you know –

Miner: That's okay. That – You've told some great stories and provided some insights in the things that I think are very useful.

Featherly: Okay.

Miner: So, we can just stop there.

Featherly: Okay.

Miner: I'll say thank you so much for taking time out and –

Featherly: You are welcome.

Miner: Appreciate it.

